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# MOMENTUM

# MOMENTUM

#1 - Sum04

Journal of Anti-Capitalist and Anti-Authoritarian Politics

## *RADICAL PERSPECTIVES ON [THE 2004] ELECTIONS*

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Cindy Milstein ■ U.S. Election as Global Referendum

Wayne Price ■ Myths About Elections

Chris Crass ■ Anarchist Organizing, Electoralism,  
and Strategy for Liberation

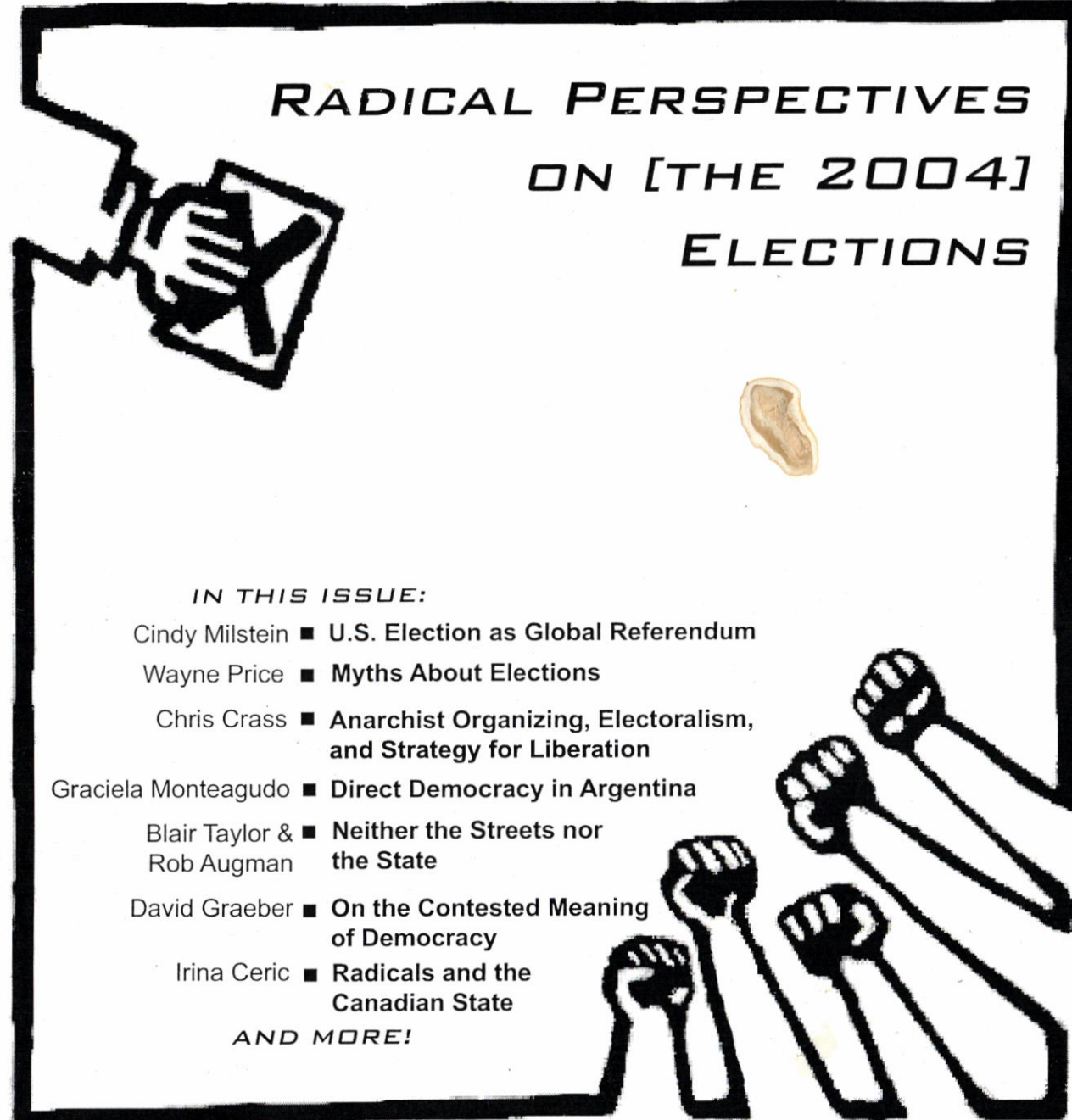
Graciela Monteagudo ■ Direct Democracy in Argentina

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*AND MORE!*





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### MISSION

*Momentum* is a forum where diverse radical voices come together to discuss political analyses, social theory, movement history, alternative visions, and strategies for change. *Momentum* aspires to provide a dynamic and interactive space for internal movement reflection, dialogue, and debate among anti-authoritarian anti-capitalists on the key issues we encounter as we work for a free society.

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## MOMENTUM

Summer 2004 - #1

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**ANONYMOUS** authors wrote *Don't Just Vote: Get Active!* The campaign is decentralized and belongs to no one, but all are welcome. Any individual or group that desires to participate is encouraged to take the text, rework it so it best expresses their views, and circulate it under their own name with their own contact information. The more groups that participate with different takes on the general idea, the better. [www.donjustvote.com](http://www.donjustvote.com)

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very instability to justify their ultimate monopoly of the means of violence. Finally, the threat of this instability becomes an excuse for a form of "democracy" so minimal that it comes down to nothing more than insisting that ruling elites should occasionally consult with "the public"—in carefully staged contests, replete with rather meaningless jousts and tournaments—to reestablish their right to go on making their decisions for them. It's a trap. Bouncing back and forth between the two ensures it will remain extremely unlikely that one could ever imagine it would be possible for people to manage their own lives, without the help of "representatives."

It's for this reason the new global movement has begun by reinventing the very meaning of democracy. To do so ultimately means, once again, coming to terms with the fact that "we"—whether as "the West" (whatever that means), as the "modern world," or anything else—are not really as special as we like to think we are; that we're not the only people ever to have practiced democracy; that in fact, rather than disseminating democracy around the world, "Western" governments have been spending at least as much time inserting themselves into the lives of people who have been practicing democracy for thousands of years, and in one way or another, telling them to cut it out.

One of the most encouraging things about these new, anarchist-inspired movements is that they propose a new form of internationalism. Older, communist internationalism had some very beautiful ideals, but in organizational terms, everyone basically flowed one way. It became a means for regimes outside Europe and its settler colonies to learn Western styles of organization: party structures, plenaries, purges, bureaucratic hierarchies, secret police... This time—the second

wave of internationalism one could call it, or just, anarchist globalization—the movement of organizational forms has largely gone the other way. It's not just consensus process: the idea of mass non-violent direct action first developed in South Africa and India; the current network model was first proposed by rebels in Chiapas; even the notion of the affinity group came out of Spain and Latin America. The fruits and techniques of ethnography could be enormously helpful here if anthropologists can get past their understandable hesitancy—owing to their own often squalid colonial history—and come to see what they are sitting on not as some guilty secret, but as the common property of humankind.

## ARGENTINE AUTONOMIST MOVEMENT AND THE ELECTIONS

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Pablo, a piquetero of the Anibal Veron says, "The actions of December 19 and 20 were not the proclamation of a revolutionary change nor did they completely bury the old regime. As a counterbalance, the elections of April will not heal the regime, wounded by the actions of 2001/2002, nor will they have a long lasting effect on our hopes of social change."

The worker-controlled factories, the micro-enterprises and community services of the unemployed workers, the assemblies with their community-building programs, and the campesinos who reclaim their land, and the radical art collectives constitute the spaces where the new movements will find resources to grow and expand. Their success can be measured there and not in an election, least of all in this last one.

*\*This article was written in May of 2003. For more info on Argentina, go to [autonomista.org](http://autonomista.org)*

## WELCOME TO MOMENTUM

the radical left's traditional abstentionist position. Much thought and discussion has been generated about perceived differences between neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism, the actual effects of electoral politics on people's lives, and the possibilities and problems elections might present for advancing our struggles. Many have concluded that it is no longer possible to "never mind the ballots," even if we might want to.

This current discourse has complicated the radical left's views on elections, producing various perspectives on how we ought to orient ourselves toward them. How we view and engage elections, representative democracy, and the state in ways that advance our struggles is, like everything else, up for consideration. This issue of *Momentum* is our contribution to furthering this important movement conversation. By highlighting some of the critical strategic and political issues at stake when contemplating electoral politics, these articles encourage us to think past this particular election year to examine our political work in a broader strategic context. It is our hope that this journal contributes to building this momentum of ideas and energy, beyond the pages and into the words and deeds that animate our struggles for a free society.

### Contribute to Momentum!

As we hope for *Momentum* to become a truly interactive forum for movement discussion, we encourage letters, essays, and artwork that respond and build on the themes initiated in this issue. The next issue of *Momentum* will publish responses that continue this conversation on radical politics and elections.

—The Editors

This journal has its origins in political discussions emanating from the growing anti-authoritarian anti-capitalist movement of the last five years. Despite this renewed burst of radical energy, there have been few spaces, aside from cyberspace, where these discussions can take place. We see *Momentum* as a contribution to this movement by providing a forum for serious and ongoing discussion of the meaning and trajectory of our struggles. As the name implies, movements must not only move, but build momentum. This means we must be reflective, constantly thinking about where we've been, where we are, where we're going, and how to get there. This requires arenas where diverse radical voices can come together to discuss our political analyses, alternative social visions, and strategies for change. *Momentum* aspires to provide one such space for intra-movement reflection, dialogue, and debate among anti-authoritarian anti-capitalists on the key issues we encounter as we work for a free society. To this end, our first issue is devoted to addressing an important issue in our current political context: (the 2004) elections.

### Nevermind the Ballots?

The cover art for this issue was borrowed from Chumbawamba's album cover *Nevermind the Ballots*. The original accompanying text was erased from the image so that it could be rephrased more openly as a question, "Never Mind the Ballots?" How will the radical left engage or not engage both the upcoming election; as well as electoralism more generally? In this issue, we have tried to pull together diverse radical voices in order to discuss this question.

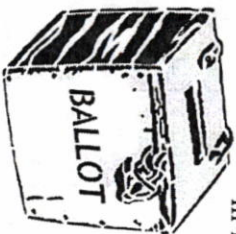
In contrast to the U.S. Presidential election of 2000, where radicals and anarchists overwhelmingly declared Bush and Gore tweedledee and tweedledum, the twins of the same corporate politics, the neo-conservative onslaught of the past four years has shaken the political landscape, including



# DON'T JUST VOTE!

People in the United States are preoccupied with voting to an unhealthy degree. This is not to say that everyone votes, or regards voting as effective or worthwhile; on the contrary, a smaller and smaller proportion of the eligible population votes every election year, and that's not just because more and more people are in prison. But when you broach the question of politics, of having a say in the way things are, voting is just about the only strategy anyone can think of—voting, and campaigning for others' votes.

Could it be this is why so many people feel so disempowered? Is anonymously checking a box once a year, or every four years, enough to feel included in the political process, let alone play a role in it? But what is there besides voting?



## Our dreams cannot fit in their ballot boxes.

In fact, voting for **cannot fit in their ballot boxes.** people to represent your interests is the least efficient and effective means of applying political power. The alternative, broadly speaking, is acting directly to represent your interests yourself.

This is known in some circles as "direct action." Direct action is occasionally misunderstood to mean another kind of campaigning, lobbying for influence on elected officials by means of political activist tactics; but it properly refers to any action or strategy that cuts out the middle man and solves problems directly, without appealing to elected representatives, corporate interests, or other powers.

Concrete examples of direct action are everywhere. When people start their own organization to share food with hungry folks,

instead of just voting for a candidate who promises to solve "the homeless problem" with tax dollars and bureaucracy, that's direct action. When a man makes and gives out fliers addressing an issue that concerns him, rather than counting on the newspapers to cover it or print his letters to the editor, that's direct action. When a woman forms a book club with her friends instead of paying to take classes at a school, or does what it takes to shut down an unwanted corporate superstore in her neighborhood herself rather than deferring to the authority of city planners, that's direct action, too.

Direct action is the foundation of the old-fashioned can-do American ethic, hands-on and no-nonsense. Without it, hardly anything would get done.

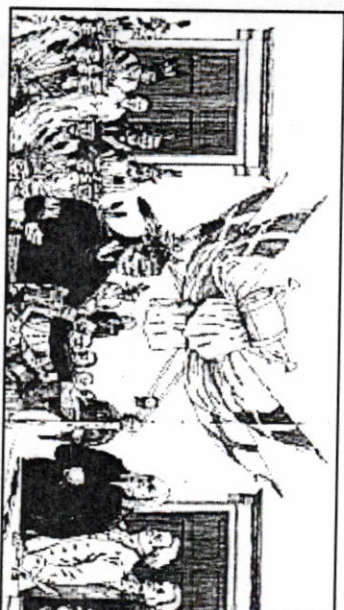
In a lot of ways, direct action is a more effective means for people to have a say in society than voting is. For one thing,

voting is a lottery—if a candidate doesn't get elected, then all the energy his constituency put into supporting him is wasted, as the power they were hoping he would exercise for them goes to someone else. With direct action, you can be sure that your work will offer some kind of results; and the resources you develop in the process, whether those be experience, contacts and recognition in your community, or organizational infrastructure, cannot be taken away from you.

Voting consolidates the power of a whole society in the hands of a few individuals; through force of sheer habit, not to speak of other methods of enforcement, everyone else is kept in a position of

# GET ACTIVE!

[www.dontjustvote.com](http://www.dontjustvote.com)



Democracy

the main reason they were never allowed to enter the city of Rome. And when Machiavelli revived the notion of a democratic republic at the dawn of the "modern" era, he immediately reverted to the notion of a populace in arms. This in turn might help explain the term "democracy" itself, which appears to have been coined as something of a slur by its elitist opponents: it literally means the "force" or even "violence" of the people. Kratos, not archos. The elitists who coined the term always considered democracy not too far from simple rioting or mob rule; though of course their solution was the permanent conquest of the people by someone else. And ironically, when they did manage to suppress democracy for this reason, which was usually, the result was that the only way the general populace's will was known was precisely through rioting, a practice that became quite institutionalized in, say, imperial Rome or eighteenth century England.

All this is not to say that direct democracies—as practiced, for example, in medieval cities or New England town meetings—were not normally orderly and dignified procedures; though one suspects that here too, in actual practice, there was a certain baseline of consensus-seeking going on. Still, it was this military undertone which allowed the authors of the Federalist Papers, like almost all other literate men of their day, to take it for granted that what they called "democracy"—by which they meant, direct democracy—was in its nature the most unstable, tumultuous form of government, not to mention

one which endangers the rights of minorities (the specific minority they had in mind in this case being the rich). It was only once the term "democracy" could be almost completely transformed to incorporate the principle of representation—a term which itself has a very curious history, since as Cornelius Castoriadis notes, it originally referred to representatives of the people before the king, internal ambassadors in fact, rather than those who wielded power in any sense themselves—that it was rehabilitated, in the eyes of well-born political theorists, and took on the meaning it has today. In a sense then anarchists think all those rightwing political theorists who insist that "America is not a democracy; it's a republic" are quite correct. The difference is that anarchists have a problem with that they think it ought to be a democracy. Though increasing numbers have come to accept that the traditional elitist criticism of majoritarian direct democracy is not entirely baseless either.

I noted earlier that all social orders are in some sense at war with themselves. Those unwilling to establish an apparatus of violence for enforcing decisions necessarily have to develop an apparatus for creating and maintaining social consensus (at least in that minimal sense of ensuring malcontents can still feel they have freely chosen to go along with bad decisions); as an apparent result, the internal war ends up projected outwards into endless night battles and forms of spectral violence. Majoritarian direct democracy is constantly threatening to make those lines of force explicit. For this reason it does tend to be rather unstable: or more precisely, if it does last, it's because its institutional forms (the medieval city, New England town council, for that matter Gallup polls, referendums...) are almost invariably ensconced within a larger framework of governance in which ruling elites use that



on the level as Pericles—is that they do not vote. Now, admittedly, this is an interesting fact. Why not? If we accept the idea that a show of hands, or having everyone who supports a proposition stand on one side of the plaza and everyone against stand on the other, are not really such incredibly sophisticated ideas that they never would have occurred to anyone until some ancient genius “invented” them, then why are they so rarely employed? Again, we seem to have an example of explicit rejection. Over and over, across the world, from Australia to Siberia, egalitarian communities have preferred some variation on consensus process. Why?

The explanation I would propose is this: it is much easier, in a face-to-face community, to figure out what most members of that community want to do, than to figure out how to convince those who do not to go along with it. Consensus decision-making is typical of societies where there would be no way to compel a minority to agree with a majority decision; either because there is no state with a monopoly of coercive force, or because the state has nothing to do with local decision-making. If there is no way to compel those who find a majority decision distasteful to go along with it, then the last thing one would want to do is to hold a vote: a public contest which someone will be seen to lose. Voting would be the most likely means to guarantee humiliations, resentments, hatreds, in the end, the destruction of communities. What is seen as an elaborate and difficult process of finding consensus is, in fact, a long process of making sure no one walks away feeling that their views have been totally ignored. Majority democracy, we might say, can only emerge when two factors coincide:

1. A feeling that people should have equal say in making group decisions, and
2. A coercive apparatus capable of enforcing those

decisions.

For most of human history, it has been extremely unusual to have both at the same time. Where egalitarian societies exist, it is also usually considered wrong to impose systematic coercion. Where a machinery of coercion did exist, it did not even occur to those wielding it that they were enforcing any sort of popular will.

It is of obvious relevance that Ancient Greece was one of the most competitive societies known to history. It was a society that tended to make everything into a public contest, from athletics to philosophy or tragic drama or just about anything else. So it might not seem entirely surprising that they made political decision-making into a public contest as well. Even more crucial though was the fact that decisions were made by a populace in arms. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, remarks that the constitution of a Greek city-state will normally depend on the chief arm of its military: if this is cavalry, it will be an aristocracy, since horses are expensive. If hoplite infantry, it will have an oligarchy, as all could not afford the armor and training. If its power was based in the navy or light infantry, one could expect a democracy, as anyone can row, or use a sling. In other words if a man is armed, then one pretty much has to take his opinions into account. One can see how this worked at its starkest in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, which tells the story of an army of Greek mercenaries who suddenly find themselves leaderless and lost in the middle of Persia. They elect new officers, and then hold a collective vote to decide what to do next. In a case like this, even if the vote was 60/40, everyone could see the balance of forces and what would happen if things actually came to blows. Every vote was, in a real sense, a conquest. Roman legions could be similarly democratic; this was

dependence. Through direct action, you become familiar with your own resources and capabilities and initiative, discovering what these are and how much you can accomplish.

Voting forces everyone in a movement to try to agree on one platform; coalitions fight over what compromises to make, each faction insists that they know the best way and the others are messing everything up by not going along with their program. A lot of energy gets wasted in these disputes and recriminations. In direct action, on the other hand, no vast consensus is necessary: different groups can apply different approaches according to what they believe in and feel comfortable doing, which can still interact to form a mutually beneficial whole. People involved in different direct actions have no need to squabble, unless they really are seeking conflicting goals (or years of voting have taught them to fight with anyone who doesn't think exactly as they do). Conflicts over voting often distract from the real issues at hand, as people get caught up in the drama of one party against another, one candidate against another, one agenda against another. With direct action, on the other hand, the issues themselves are raised, addressed specifically, and often resolved.

Voting is only possible when election time comes around. Direct action can be applied whenever one sees fit. Voting is only useful for addressing whatever topics are current in the political agendas of candidates, while direct action can be applied in every aspect of your life, in every part of the world you live in.

Voting is glorified as “freedom” in action.

It's not freedom—freedom is getting to decide what the choices are in the first place, not picking between Pepsi and Coca-Cola. Direct action is the real thing. You make the plan, you create the options, the sky's the limit.

Ultimately, there's no reason the strategies of voting and direct action can't both be applied together. One does not cancel the other out. The problem is that so many people think of voting as their primary way of exerting political and social power that a disproportionate amount of everyone's time and energy is spent deliberating and debating how they should vote while other opportunities to make change go to waste. For months and months preceding every election, everyone argues about the voting issue, what candidates to vote for or whether to vote at all, when voting itself takes less than an hour. Vote or don't, but get on with it! Remember how many other ways you can make your voice heard.

This being an election year, we hear constantly about the options available to us as voters, and almost nothing about our other opportunities to play a decisive role in our society. What we need is a campaign to emphasize the possibilities more direct means of action and community involvement have to offer. These need not be seen as in contradiction with voting. We can spend an hour voting once a year, and the other three hundred sixty four days and twenty three hours acting directly!

Those who are totally disenchanted with representative democracy, who dream of a world without presidents and politicians, can rest assured that if we all learn how to apply deliberately the

**We can spend an hour voting once a year, and the other three hundred sixty four days and twenty three hours acting directly!**



power that each of us has, the question of which politician is elected to office will become a moot point. They only have that power because we delegate it to them! A campaign for direct action puts power back where it belongs, in the hands of the people from whom it originates.

**Nation-Wide Call to Action:  
Don't Just Vote, Get Active!**

We are calling for a national campaign, in every town, neighborhood, and countryside, to take advantage of this election year to emphasize the power of direct action and direct democracy. This campaign will include poster, sticking, and other forms of urban and suburban redecorating, as well as massive literature distribution, street demonstrations, and similar community outreach. It will culminate in a nation-wide day of direct action on election day.

On this day, people across the country will come together in groups both large and small to demonstrate the effectiveness of direct action in getting things done, and of direct democracy as a means for communities to work together. Those who desire to take an hour out of this day to cast a vote are welcome to; after the event is over, people can reconvene and compare which approach was more rewarding and empowering, voting or direct action.

**Why This Campaign?**

Elections in this country are the reddest of red herrings. Liberals have been so fixated upon them as to forget most other means of applying power; losses in elections have demoralized and disempowered the left in general. Anti-authoritarians, on the other hand, while claiming not to recognize the sovereignty of any officials, elected or not, have nonetheless developed their own mythology around voting, attributing to it the

mystical power to "legitimize" authority figures thus elected. But it is not voting that gives power to politicians, just as it is not not-voting that could take it away from them; they have power because we place our power in their hands, because we fail to apply it deliberately ourselves.

Quite a bit of energy is squandered by liberals and radicals debating the old question of whether or not to vote; the answer, of course, is that it's the wrong question. For people to be able to focus on getting power back in their hands, the terms themselves have to be set anew. To sidestep the entire issue of voting, and instead focus all attention on the alternative ways to apply power, can save everyone a lot of wasted energy, and unlock vast potential.

As a national campaign, this has strengths going for it that few others do. First of all, it addresses a subject that is already foremost in the public mind. By refusing to take a stand on the false dichotomy presented by the media, or even the other false dichotomy presented by traditional radicalism or apathy, it evades thoughtless dismissals. A campaign that declines to take sides but instead raises entirely new questions can be provocative without being alienating.

Second of all, it's both global and local. We don't have to try to get all concerned activists to come to one city to demonstrate around this issue; on the contrary, this is a perfect opportunity for people to act where they live, while feeling connected to a nationwide campaign.

Third, the broadness of the general theme—direct action itself—is such that participation is open to anyone, with any preferred brand of tactics, at any desired level of engagement or risk. This is a campaign that your chapter of Food Not

decisions this way, and everything had to be spelled out; whereas in Madagascar, everyone had been doing this since they learned to speak.

In fact, as anthropologists are aware, just about every known human community which has to come to group decisions has employed some variation of what I'm calling "consensus process"—every one, that is, which is not in some way or another drawing on the tradition of ancient Greece. Majoritarian democracy, in the formal, Roberts Rules of Order type sense rarely emerges of its own accord. It's curious that almost no one, anthropologists included, ever seems to ask oneself why this should be.

**An hypothesis.**

Majoritarian democracy was, in its origins, essentially a military institution. Of course it's the peculiar bias of Western historiography that this is the only sort of democracy that is seen to count as "democracy" at all. We are usually told that democracy originated in ancient Athens—like science, or philosophy, it was a Greek invention. It's never entirely clear what this is supposed to mean. Are we supposed to believe that before the Athenians, it never really occurred to anyone, anywhere, to gather all the members of their community in order to make joint decisions in a way that gave everyone equal say? That would be ridiculous. Clearly there have been plenty of egalitarian societies in history—many far more egalitarian than Athens, many that must have existed before 500 BCE—and obviously, they must have had some kind of procedure for coming to decisions for matters of collective importance. Yet somehow, it is always assumed that these procedures, whatever they might have been, could not have been, properly speaking, "democratic."

Even scholars with otherwise impeccable

radical credentials, promoters of direct democracy, have been known to bend themselves into pretzels trying to justify this attitude. Non-Western egalitarian communities are "kin-based," argues Murray Bookchin. (And Greece was not? Of course the Athenian agora was not itself kin-based but neither is a Malagasy fok'on'olona or Balinese seka. So what?) "Some might speak of Iroquois or Berber democracy," argued Cornelius Castoriadis, "but this is an abuse of the term. These are primitive societies which assume the social order is handed to them by gods or spirits, not self-constituted by the people themselves as in Athens." (Really? In fact the



"League of the Iroquois" was a treaty organization, seen as a common agreement created in historical times, and subject to constant renegotiation.) The arguments never make sense. But they don't really have to because we are not really dealing with arguments at all here, so much as with the brush of a hand.

The real reason for the unwillingness of most scholars to see a Sulawesi or Tallensi village council as "democratic"—well, aside from simple racism, the reluctance to admit anyone Westerners slaughtered with such relative impunity were quite

*...continued on page 16*



# BEYOND VOTING: Anarchist Organizing, Electoral Politics and Developing Strategy For Liberation

By Chris Crass

taken literally. In the best tradition of direct action, they not only confronted a certain form of power, exposing its mechanisms and attempting literally to stop it in its tracks: they did it in a way which demonstrated why the kind of social relations on which it is based were unnecessary. This is why all the condescending remarks about the movement being dominated by a bunch of dumb kids with no coherent ideology completely missed the mark. The diversity was a function of the decentralized form of organization, and this organization was the movement's ideology.

The key term in the new movement is "process," by which is meant, decision-making process. In North America, this is almost invariably done through some process of finding consensus. This is as I mentioned much less ideologically stifling than it may sound because the assumption behind all good consensus process is that one should not even try to convert others to one's overall point of view; the point of consensus process is to allow a group to decide on a common course of action. Instead of voting proposals up and down, then, proposals are worked and reworked, scotched or reinvented, until one ends up with something everyone can live with. When it comes to the final stage, actually "finding consensus," there are two levels of possible objection: one can "stand aside," which is to say "I don't like this and won't participate but I wouldn't stop anyone else from doing it," or "block," which has the effect of a veto. One can only block if one feels a proposal is in violation of the fundamental principles or reasons for being of a group. One might say that the function which in the US constitution is relegated to the courts, of striking down legislative decisions that violate constitutional principles, is here relegated to anyone with the courage to actually stand up against the combined

will of the group (though of course there are also ways of challenging unprincipled blocks).

One could go on at length about the elaborate and surprisingly sophisticated methods that have been developed to ensure all this works; of forms of modified consensus required for very large groups; of the way consensus itself reinforces the principle of decentralization by ensuring one doesn't really want to bring proposals before very large groups unless one has to, of means of ensuring gender equity and resolving conflict... The point is this is a form of direct democracy which is very different than the kind we usually associate with the term—or, for that matter, with the kind usually employed by European or North American anarchists of earlier generations, or still employed, say, in urban Argentine asambleas.

In North America, consensus process emerged more than anything else through the feminist movement, as part of broad backlash against some of the more obnoxious, self-aggrandizing macho leadership styles of the '60s New Left. Much of the procedure was originally adopted from the Quakers, and Quaker inspired groups; the Quakers, in turn, claim to have been inspired by Native American practice. How much the latter is really true is, in historical terms, difficult to determine. Nonetheless, Native American decision-making did normally work by some form of consensus. Actually, so do most popular assemblies around the world now, from the Tzeltal or Tzotzil or Tojolobal-speaking communities in Chiapas to Madagascar for two years. After having lived in Madagascar for two years, I was startled, the first time I started attending meetings of the Direct Action Network in New York, by how familiar it all seemed—the main difference was that the DAN process was so much more formalized and explicit. It had to be, since everyone in DAN was just figuring out how to make

Presidential elections are often the terrain on which radicals and anarchists debate the merits of electoral politics. This election season is no different. Social movements around the world and in the United States are declaring Bush's defeat at the ballot box a top priority. As radicals, we have consistently opposed the policies of the Bush administration and have mobilized our opposition repeatedly to the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq. We know that the Democratic Party shares the majority of the Republican Party's platform. Both candidates represent ruling class worldviews and institutions of domination. What do we do?

## The Relationship of Theory, Strategy, and Tactics

There are many discussions about how to vote out the Bush administration. I want to urge us to step back and talk about electoral politics and larger questions of strategy. For anarchists, voting and electoral politics spark intense debate because they bring fundamental questions to the surface. How do we believe revolutionary transformation happens? How do we build movement? Where does power come from? How do we act in the world? From there we ask more specific questions. How do we as radical organizers, left activists and anarchists relate to elections and electoral politics in general? Are elections an opportunity for strategic intervention or a waste of time?

At the heart of all of these debates is the question of strategy. Where are we going and how are we going to get there? I want to reflect on my relationship to electoral politics as an anarchist, because I think the presidential elections often get us debating tactics when really we need to think about strategy.

I have often heard the argument that you

cannot be an anarchist if you vote or participate in electoral politics. Voting is a tactic. As a tactic I know it is connected to core values about power and decision making, but if we're to develop meaningful strategy all of our tactics need to be evaluated and updated where need be. I'd like to make a distinction between core beliefs, and tactics or actions that express these core beliefs. For me, anarchism is fundamentally based in a belief in the capacity of people to share power with each other, to build societies based on having power with people rather than over people. Power with people forms the base of societies organized on principles of self-determination, cooperation and justice. Many of our tactics have been useful in expressing our core beliefs, but overall we are still far from being a meaningful challenge to the ruling order of domination and exploitation. I want to think about our tactics, strategies and theories not only in terms of how they express our core beliefs, but how they help move us to living our core beliefs. We are largely successful practicing this in groups and communities of dozens. However, our tactics, strategies and theories need to deal with societies of millions.

The anarchist analysis of the state has made important contributions to revolutionary theory, particularly in the mid-1800s through the early 1900's. But our theory has remained rooted in the past and today it is often one dimensional and based in a deep mystification of how power actually operates. While proclaiming "smash the state", our analysis leaves little room to figure out how to actually make that happen. Voting and elections will not achieve revolutionary change. But this is not the point, as no isolated tactic or campaign will.

In practice, hundreds of self-identified anarchists around the country are already engaged



with electoral politics in a variety of ways, organizing around issues from welfare and affirmative action, to environmental policy and reproductive rights. But our analysis of this work is rarely discussed in print and is still largely absent from what is considered anarchist theory. If our theory is unable to help us understand the reality of the work we are already doing, then it becomes a barrier to integrating the concrete details of our work into a strategy for revolutionary change.

We need theory to help us understand the world and inform our strategy. We also need to reflect on our actual practices and the complexities of reality and update our theory. Historically, anarchists have been heavy on action and light on theory. For US anarchists today, life in the heart of empire creates urgency to end injustices committed in our name. This often leads to feeling frantic, and the need to act often outweighs study and strategic planning. When we operate with enormous long-term goals of revolution and liberation without short-term goals to guide us and help us evaluate success, then our culture promotes turnover and burnout.

Developing strategy is about setting short-term and long-term goals and creating plans to reach them. Strategy is seeing how accomplishing short-term goals helps build our capacities as individuals and organizations in order to be in a better position to work for our long-term goals. Strategy is most useful when based in an engaged praxis of theory, action and reflection. This way it stays grounded in reality, encourages evaluation of outcomes to increase effectiveness and in good case scenarios means being pro-active and visionary rather than reactive and confined to the framework of systems of oppression.

Electoral politics has been only a small part

8

of my overall work, but I am putting energy into this discussion because I think electoral politics in particular and reform oriented work in general opens up some of the big questions about anarchist strategy. Since 1994, I have voted in over a dozen elections on the local, state and federal level, and have actively participated in electoral campaigns on city and state level ballot initiatives/propositions. I have worked to both get rid of candidates, and to put them into office. To be clear, I do not believe that we should unconditionally do electoral work. I believe that we need to be strategic about when and how to be involved. All of the electoral struggles that I have participated in have been community-based struggles with leadership from radical/left organizations and individuals that I felt affinity with. I do electoral work not in spite of my anarchist politics, but because I'm an anarchist committed to building broad movements for social, economic, racial and environmental justice.

The next two sections are an overview of my experience with anarchist organizing and electoral politics. In my reflections I try to highlight the strategic thinking that guided my actions. Ultimately, I believe at this point in history we need a fusion of anarchist direct action organizing, collective liberation politics and left/radical community organizing. This fusion is key to developing the kind of movement strategies we need.

### Anarchism and Electoral Work: Fighting the

#### Right in California

Proposition 187, also known as Save Our State (SOS), was a California ballot measure for the 1994 election which was to prohibit undocumented immigrants from having access to public healthcare, education or any social service. The official wording

# ---DEMOCRACY---

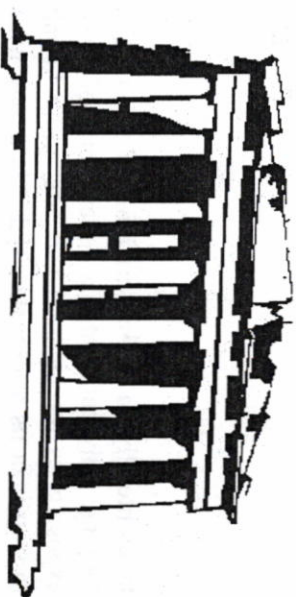
By David Graeber

*This article is a selection from David Graeber's new book "Fragments Towards an Anarchist Anthropology." Although not directly discussing electoral politics, he makes an argument that raises key issues about voting, consensus, majority rule, and the democratic tradition that underlie our strategic orientation towards electoral politics.*

—Editors

The first cycle of the new global uprising—what the press still insists on referring to, increasingly ridiculously, as “the anti-globalization movement”—began with the autonomous municipalities of Chiapas and came to a head with the asambleas barrales of Buenos Aires, and cities throughout Argentina. There is hardly room here to tell the whole story: beginning with the Zapatistas’ rejection of the idea of seizing power and their attempt instead to create a model of democratic self-organization to inspire the rest of Mexico; their initiation of an international network (People’s Global Action, or PGA) which then put out the calls for days of action against the WTO in Seattle, IMF in Washington and Prague; and finally, the collapse of the Argentine economy, and the overwhelming popular uprising which, again, rejected the very idea that one could find a solution by replacing one set of politicians with another.

The slogan of the Argentine movement was, from the start, *que se vayan todos*—get rid of the lot of them. Instead of a new government they created a vast network of alternative institutions, starting with popular assemblies to govern each urban neighborhood (the only limitation on participation is that one cannot be employed by a political party), hundreds of occupied, worker-managed factories, a complex system of “barter” and newfangled alternative currency system to keep them in operation—in short, an endless variation on



DEMOCRACY IS A GREEK WORD  
COMPOSED OF TWO PARTS:  
DEMOS THE PEOPLE  
KRATOS THE RULE  
THE RULE OF THE PEOPLE

the theme of direct democracy.

All of this has happened completely below the radar screen of the corporate media, which also missed the point of the great mobilizations. The organization of these actions was meant to be a living illustration of what a truly democratic world might be like, from the festive puppets to the careful organization of affinity groups and spokescouncils, all operating without a leadership structure, always based on principles of consensus-based direct democracy. It was the kind of organization which most people would have, had they simply heard it proposed, written off as a pipe-dream; but it worked, and so effectively that the police departments of city after city were completely flummoxed with how to deal with them. Of course, this also had something to do with the unprecedented tactics (hundreds of activists in fairy suits tickling police with feather dusters, or padded with so many inflatable inner tubes and rubber cushions they seemed to roll along like the Michelin man over barricades, incapable of damaging anyone else but also pretty much impervious to police batons...), which completely confused traditional categories of violence and nonviolence.

When protesters in Seattle chanted “this is what democracy looks like,” they meant to be



a response to the potentially revolutionary upheaval during the 1930s and 1940s. The NDP is widely seen as lesser of three evils within the broad left, and despite recent betrayals while in power in Ontario and British Columbia (the NDP has never won a federal election), has a history of support for workers' rights, universal health care and civil rights. As the traditional party of trade unions, and according to some, the working class more broadly, the NDP's platform has evolved into support for the fiscally responsible, mini welfare state, the rights of 'minorities', nominally non-interventionist foreign policy and the unquestioning maintenance of a capitalist economy.

But factors apart from disagreements with the NDP's party line also play into the reluctance of radicals to wholeheartedly support its candidates. The NDP is certainly not a fringe party, but considerations of strategic voting operate in ridings across the Canadian state just as they did in the U.S. during Ralph Nader's presidential campaign in 2000. In ridings with a conservative base, activists who have chosen to mark a ballot must often choose between voting for a Liberal candidate with some chance of winning or 'wasting their vote' by selecting the NDP candidate. This characteristic of the parliamentary system, along with the NDP's certain progression toward the right, has rendered the existence of a social democratic party moot for most radical leftists. Attempts to bring the NDP in line with the anti-globalization movement in the late 1990s also failed to either win young activists over to electoral politics or revitalize a stagnant political party. It remains to be seen whether the NDP's new leader Jack Layton, a longtime Toronto city councilor with strong leftist credentials, can generate increased support during the coming

election, although a resurgence is certainly possible given Layton's political history and wide base of support both within the party and the broader left.

Whether the irrelevance of the NDP to the work of most radicals in the Canadian state should be seen as a failure of the party as a potential tool for social change is a larger and different question, but it is clear that a social democratic party operating in the current North American context does not and cannot challenge capitalism and its attendant evils so as to be a viable project or tool of the radical left, especially between elections. When that political context changes and there is again a crisis of sufficient strength to challenge the continued social and financial viability of the capitalist system, the question of what role activists should play within the electoral system will arise again but with much higher stakes. At that point, with the main political parties discredited and insurgent social movements on the offensive, radicals will have to object to social democracy as the last defence of the capitalist system, and not as its lesser evil.

on the ballot described itself as "the first giant stride in ultimately ending the illegal alien invasion." Proposition 187 was an attack on a whole category of people based on race and language, an attack on entire families, communities and generations which was both deeply historic and institutional.

Marching in the streets with hundreds and thousands against Prop 187 was a challenge to my whole understanding of voting. This was not about voting for a master, nor was this a movement of people deceived by the illusion of choice. This was a movement of youth, parents, grandparents, workers, farmers, students, teachers and young children in the arms of their parents moving in the streets saying: "We are fully human", "We stand together in solidarity with other oppressed people to say no to this system that is killing our communities". There was no question in my mind that we needed to defeat this measure and that voting was a tactic to use because this manifestation of state oppression was both expressing itself and struggled against in the electoral arena.

It's important to note that elections are widely interpreted as the clearest expressions of what broad numbers of people believe politically. The right has been extremely effective at arguing the "will of the voters" to advance their agenda. While radicals are quick to note that the majority of people

don't vote, the pre-election corporate media spin and the actual poll results have an enormous impact on the broader political climate. In a real way, votes represent belief systems and political commitments. If Prop 187 wins by 10 or more percentage points then it signals a base of support for even more rightwing measures and candidates. It also sets a tone for what corporations and politicians think they can get away with and build support for.

I remember talking with a progressive/left, white, queer schoolteacher in San Francisco. She said, "I agree with a lot of what I understand anarchism to be, but I don't trust anarchists. Every time powerful forces come after oppressed communities with all of these propositions, all the anarchists I talk with say they don't believe in legitimizing the power of the state because they won't get their hands dirty in electoral politics. Don't you understand that the state has real power over people's

lives? This is not a game that you get to choose to play in or not. While you might have the privilege to stand there 'more radical then thou', most of us are fighting for our lives. Being 'above it all' is not a choice."

This is why Rahula Janowski, mother and long time anarchist, believes that voting is a form of harm reduction. "For me, voting isn't the path to my ideal future society. I vote because I feel





a sense of responsibility to act in the real world around me. When rich neo-liberals running for office are building their power scapegoating poor and homeless people, I think we need to take action. I've participated in local elections for candidates not because I thought they'd make things a lot better, but because I wanted to stop things from getting much worse in the short term."

While these were some of the most direct critiques I've heard of anarchists and voting, I've seen many express similar sentiments. I agree that voting can have the effect of legitimizing the state. I agree that questioning representative democracy in a capitalist society and questioning the role of voting in social change have all been positive contributions to revolutionary thought. However, I believe that our politics of non-engagement in so many crucial struggles involving the state, electoral politics among them, have in the end done more to de-legitimize anarchists than to de-legitimize the power of the state. Furthermore, I have worked with community-based struggles that have both turned out the vote and attacked the legitimacy of the state. I know that we are smart enough and creative enough to vote; to participate in electoral politics when it is strategic and advance a radical systemic analysis.

What is critical to understand is that we're not just fighting for votes, but for left/radical politics. The work of moving people to particular positions, mobilizing support for particular positions and turning people out on election day presents a clear structure to do mass political education and outreach with a clear next step that every individual is given. In many cases, to turn my back on electoral politics would be turning my back on the most pressing struggles of the day. At this point, rather than argue with someone against voting when they are likely

looking for some way to make their opinions heard, I encourage people to express their opinions through voting and then try to connect their own desire to impact the world to broader political commitments like activism and community struggles. My goal is not to win an argument about reform/revolution. My goal is to bring people into the movement and win.

### **The Mission Anti-Displacement Coalition**

The most educational and inspiring experience I've had working on a campaign that included electoral politics was during the height of gentrification in the Mission District of San Francisco. Enormous amounts of capital were being invested in dot-com startups that led to a dramatic rise in evictions of long time Mission District residents, mostly working class and people of color.

In 2000, with landlords, developers, and rich capitalists celebrating and profiting from the dislocation of working families, communities of color and low-income tenants, the Mission Anti-Displacement Coalition emerged. MAC was a collaboration between many of the most dynamic community organizations in the Mission fighting to build worker and tenant power, and fighting for environmental, racial and economic justice. MAC used a multi-faceted campaign strategy that

used direct action, electoral politics, community mobilizations, political education. The campaign had an immediate goal of halting gentrification and explicitly combined that with a long-term goal of popular control by communities over the decisions impacting them.

My understanding of electoral politics and revolutionary strategy has been greatly influenced by Anti-Racism for Global Justice organizer Clare Bayard, who worked in MAC representing Food Not Bombs. She explains how MAC worked to

from those of U.S. activists in several key respects. First, the strategic issues raised by a Parliamentary electoral system which does not allow for direct election of the head of state. And more importantly, the profoundly political and strategic questions raised by the presence of a social democratic party on every ballot. Both factors illuminate some of the key questions activists ought to be wrestling with.

### **Playing with Party Politics**

The three main political parties throughout Canada are the Conservative Party (far right, fiscally and socially), the currently governing Liberal Party (right) and the New Democratic Party (once socialist, now vaguely socially democratic in theory, but firmly neo-liberal when actually in power – see below). Additionally, the sovereignist Bloc Québécois is a major party in the province of Québec.

The Prime Minister is the leader of the party which wins a majority of seats in parliament, each seat being elected in a riding, a geographic division based on population (minority governments are a possibility as well, although one has not occurred in recent memory). The focus on ridings both narrows and expands the political terrain of an election campaign. Just as with presidential candidates, party leaders take on charismatic, 'cult of personality' roles that have little to do with the substantive issues or policies of the parties, and the selection of one or another seems only tenuously related to your ballot.

Yet it is at least arguable that the political space opened by the progress of election campaigns – meetings and debates, appearances by candidates, even the lowest common denominator coverage of election issues in the corporate media – can be to some extent co-opted or exploited by activists. Under the parliamentary system, activists located

in key ridings can harness additional organizing opportunities due to the presence of a prominent candidate or the existence of a local issue with broad or national importance. Activists in the home ridings of senior cabinet ministers are particularly well-placed to score a few points during election season. Citizen and Immigration Minister Judy Sgro for example, will no doubt hear from Toronto organizers of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and other groups about the on-going criminalization, detention and harassment of immigrants and refugees.

Using the familiar tools of community organizing – public meetings and educationals, pickets and demos, direct actions, etc. – radicals can effectively co-opt and exploit the banal and alienating election campaign spectacles, doing locally what we currently lack the capacity to do widely. The participation of other groups in local election events, including both potential allies such as union members seconded to NDP campaigns and community non-profits and opponents such as conservative rate-payers organizations and business associations, provides further opportunities for coalition-building, intelligence gathering and outreach about our day-to-day work. Finally, the tactical and strategic questions raised by the effective use of such political space, particularly the tension between revolutionary and liberal left demands, should fuel crucial internal debates within radical movements and groups.

### **Dealing with (Social) Democrats**

The legacy and current fortune of the NDP is perhaps the most resilient election issue for the radical left in the Canadian state. The NDP has a history of co-opting social movements into electoral reformism, a soft-pressure strategy which resulted in the development of the modern welfare state as



# Strategizing the Ballot Box

## Radicals and Elections in the Canadian State

By Irina Ceric

Radical left activists questioning engagement with electoral politics face many of the same issues and questions in Canada and the U.S. At the most fundamental level, we must decide how to deal with the proffered 'democratic' process when our politics see a limited or non-existent role for the state and government as it is currently formulated. We can choose to participate by campaigning for and against candidates or by building existing projects and campaigns during election time, or we can eschew even the appearance of legitimating electoral politics through calculated avoidance or by explicit rejection. Yet we also realize that as members of a marginal political community or movement, our strategic and tactical options are limited, that we fall outside the margins of the partisan noise which passes for political discourse during the course of an election campaign, and that as a result, our (non)participation will likely have only the most ephemeral of consequences.

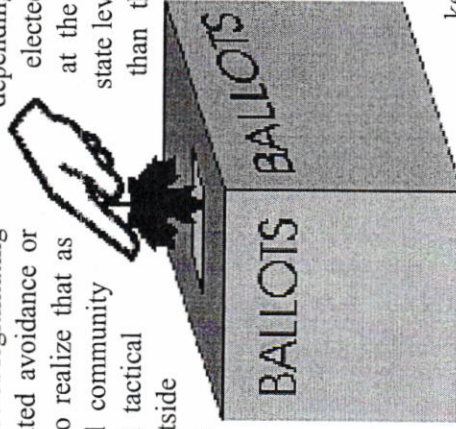
Despite the radical left's ambivalence towards electoral politics however, it should be clear that in an election year as bloody as this one, the politicians 'chosen' by voters in Canada and the U.S. do matter, both at home and abroad. While the Canadian state is certainly not an imperial power in the same bracket, and has managed to maintain a tenacious grip on its farcical international reputation as a progressive, benevolent peacekeeper, Canada does wield some influence as a NATO power and a coalition member of most U.S. imperialist adventures. Domestically, the picture for radical activists ought to be even

clearer. Federal government policy touches on many of the day-to-day struggles we engage in: immigration, criminal 'justice', foreign policy and defence, international trade, etc.

In other words, radicals in the Canadian state must answer the same questions which trouble U.S. activists – if we conclude that elections and their outcomes matter, should we engage in political work directly related to elections, and if so, how? In all large, federal states, the answers change depending on the level of government being elected – it seems obvious that elections at the municipal, county or provincial/state level are an entirely different creature than the coronation of a president or prime minister. Arguably, local elections do have a more direct relationship to democratic representation and decision-making, and more legitimacy as a result.

The more difficult questions therefore, the ones containing key issues with respect to strategy, goals and revolutionary vision, arise during federal or national elections such as the ones both Canada and the U.S. will hold in 2004. Again, many of the dilemmas are similar in both countries: how to gauge the principled level of engagement with an unjust system's illegitimate electoral methods, the wisdom of campaigning for transitional or reformist change rather than revolutionary upheaval, the need to engage in work with other community organizations or broader coalitions, and so on.

But the experience and practice of radicals in the Canadian state during elections will differ



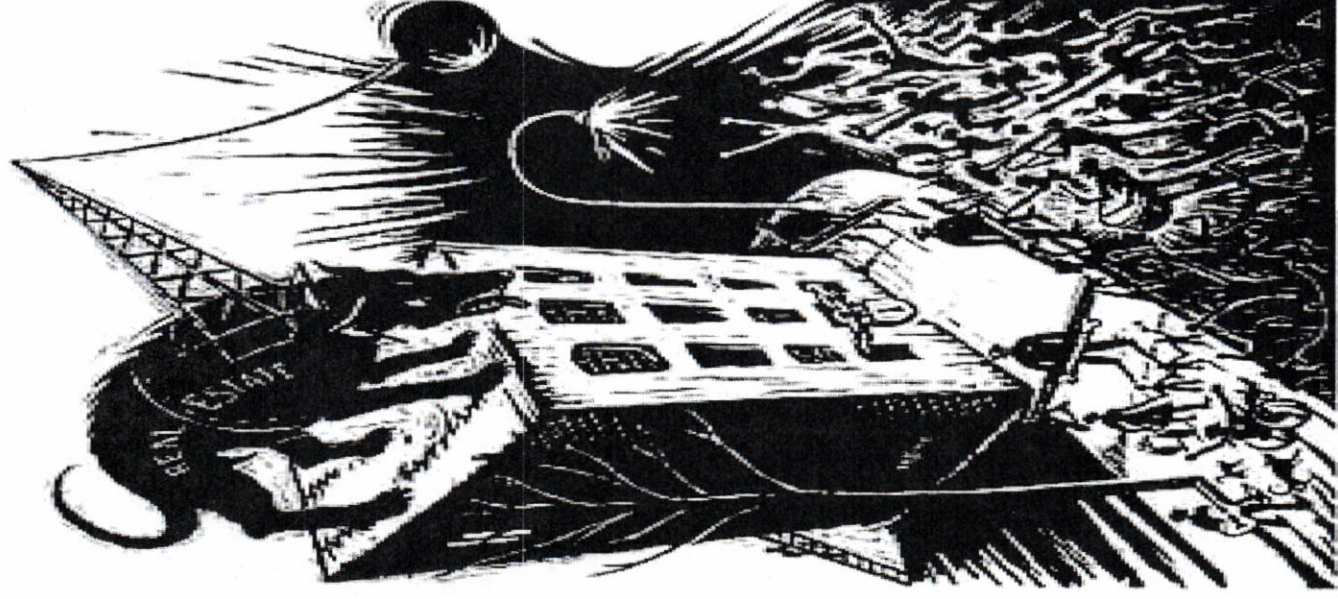
bring these together:

"MAC utilized city elections to focus and build larger campaigns around shifting control from city hall to a neighborhood level, a political goal I held in theory but had never seen anyone even realistically attempt. While mobilizing around legislation on the ballot, MAC also supported a slate of progressive candidates for the Board of Supervisors. For me, it was easier at that time to get behind fights for housing propositions than to be involved in a candidacy. But through my involvement in the coalition, I saw how work around a candidate could be successfully framed entirely around issues, making the vote a referendum both on city politics and about which residents of San Francisco matter; that working class communities and communities of color have a voice and have political power in this city."

I want to be clear that electoral politics is but a small part of a much larger strategy. Anarchist tenant organizer Ingrid Chapman underlines this point, "When organizing around propositions we must look past the elections, because the reality of the system is that the wealthy rightwing has a clear advantage, and hard-fought progressive laws can be --and often are--overturned or tremendously weakened. We must always be thinking about how and what we are building for post-election day. Not just getting folk out to vote, but where does that community power go after the election? And when we win or lose, what tactics can we use outside the electoral system and formal politics to empower folk and keep fighting?"

### Beyond Bush, Against Imperialism

The focus of my argument about electoral politics has been elections on the local and state level. Getting the Bush administration out of the White





House is not my primary goal, but nevertheless, it is a goal. Gabriel Sayegh has contributed an important essay "Tear down the prison, get out the vote: an anti-racist argument for voting" which presents a strong argument to white radicals to vote against Bush.

He writes: "If white activists continue along the line of 'there's no difference between the candidates so I won't vote' then we miss the very important ways that the candidates do differ, and how those differences can be leveraged in an effort to build a stronger movement. While Bush and Kerry are certain to serve many of the same corporate masters, there are everyday material realities which, however small they may seem to upper and middle class white people, are indeed enormously significant to those who aren't white or aren't middle/upper class... That doesn't mean the Democrats are the answer to Bush or the Republicans. It means that white activists need to be politically savvy enough to understand how those little, narrow nuances that separate the candidates and political parties are not so little and narrow to everyone. For millions of poor people--most of them people of color--that dime's worth of difference between Republican and Democrat can mean life or death."

How can we use these differences to weaken both parties' positions and strengthen ours? For example, the imperialism of the Bush administration favors unilateralism and military force and this is generally opposed by Democrats who under the Clinton administration preferred the imperialism of international trade agreements, diplomacy and more structural state violence like sanctions. How can we move the slogans from focusing on a person to a system? From "Anyone but Bush" to "Everyone Against Empire"? If we can bring an anti-imperialist/anti-empire politics into

the growing frustration with the US war on Iraq, it can open doors to broader political engagement against the imperialist agenda of both parties.

It's important that we approach this election just as any other struggle; develop goals for yourself and/or with the groups you work with so that you set your own terms for what success is. My primary goal continues to be the development of a broad-based, radical/left, anti-racist, feminist, anti-capitalist movement led by people of color, women, queer, transgendered and working class people. I believe that the combination of collective liberation politics, community-based organizing strategies of building power, and direct action strategies of expressing and sharing power, will help us create a fusion of radical analysis and practice to get us beyond the question of who we're voting for and get on with build the worlds that live in our hearts.

*\* This essay is an edited version of a longer essay that includes a survey of anarchist strategy in the 90's and more in depth analysis of the right-wing, elections, and white supremacy. The full version is on Znet under Vision/Strategy at zmag.org*

Dario Santillan of the piquetero organization Anibal Veron.

-Eviction of the worker-managed Brukman factory and brutal repression of the 7,000 people action lead by the workers, Madres de Plaza de Mayo, and national representatives to recuperate the factory.

-Even more effective, after the piquetes and the mass mobilizations, the government initiated a welfare program benefiting more people than any program in any other Latin American country.

-Savings were returned to the middle class, however devaluated. This really deepened the gap between the middle class and the unemployed workers and enjoyed propagandistic support from a virtually monolithic media that favored "democracy" and the elections while opposing the road blockades.

-Although the elections helped the government by bringing the focus back to representational democracy, as opposed to the ongoing direct democracy processes, it also exposed a marked weakness of the system.

The elections process demands further explanation and analysis. Appointed by Congress as an interim President, with the task to call for elections in the near future, Duhalde ignored his status and held onto power until June 2002. Responding to pressure from the Governors of the Interior and to hints from the IMF, the government ordered the repression of a massive road blockade that ended with hundreds of people injured by the police, some with lead bullets, and two piqueteros, Maxi Kosteki and Dario Santillan, dead. Dario, a 21 year old organizer, was executed pointblank by the police while helping Maxi, a 23 year old artist involved with the movements. In the social upheaval that preceded the repression, with thousands of people

protesting against state terrorism, the government called for elections-but just presidential elections. At that point the social movements felt strongly that the elections were a fraud; to participate in them would be to turn the movements of December 2001 into an electoral farce.

The electoral process reveals a pathetic and fraudulent system, especially after Menem's withdrawal from the electoral process. When taking into account all of the people who refused to vote, the newly elected president, Nestor Kirchner, won thanks to a mere 16% of the electorate. Another symptom of this crisis is a highly fragmented society and with it, the end of bipartisanship. Perhaps more significantly, hardly anyone in Argentina has expressed any excitement or expectations for any of the candidates. Despite the fact that Argentine politicians now feel comfortable making public appearances and even get some votes, they are definitely not in the presence of people who have any illusions about the system.

However, people will not abstain from voting in under the threat of state terror without a strong alternative program to the corrupted democracy that the elections represent. Lacking such an alternative, some people conceptualized a vote for Kirchner as a vote against neoliberalism. This belief will most likely soon be exposed as the same kind of illusion that motivated people to elect De la Rúa as an alternative to Menem. De la Rúa's administration resulted in high unemployment, confiscated savings, looting, and murderous repression of massive spontaneous protests. People feel that Menem and his gang should be kept out of power and rightly so. However, the change they hope for will not come until they recognize an alternative to the system he represents.

*...continued on page 34*



neoliberalism, and advocated for civil liberties, most of the participants did not have a clear consciousness of the significance of their actions. Furthermore, these people failed to recognize themselves as a powerful movement that could build an alternative to the IMF/local-government model. This failure explains how Congress was able to appoint a candidate that had lost the presidential elections of 1999, even after two weeks of falling administrations. Duhalde had a meeting with G.W. Bush in which a potential succession to the presidency was discussed, in case the De La Rúa government failed. The possibility of a coup is currently being investigated in the courts.

These massive mobilizations unleashed incredible forces and creative methods of struggle. It reinforced the struggle of the piqueteros and supported the recuperation of 200 factories under workers control, in which 10,000 people manage the production and commercialization of everything from bread to tractors throughout the country. It created the popular assemblies, neighborhood spaces for discussion of these new politics, community services and coordination of direct actions. Ezequiel Adamovsky, from the Cid Campeador Popular Assembly, points out that it is because of the struggle of this movement that the complete destruction of the Argentina economy and its working class was

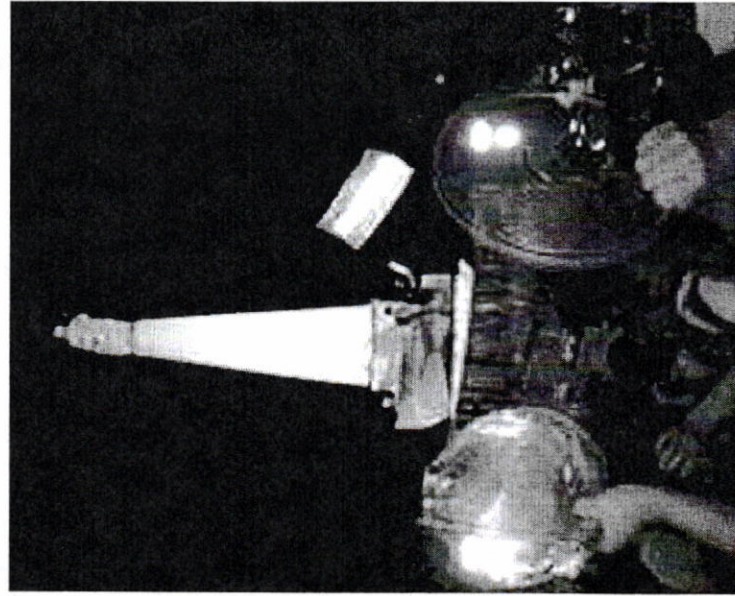
somewhat avoided. For example, through massive direct actions, the movements empowered the negotiations between the government and the IMF, defaulting on its payment for a whole year. The devaluation of the salaries was stopped through various protests. Ezequiel also points out in La Vaca (URL), that these movements have created also a new radical culture that is transforming politics into something new and different, organized around three elements: horizontality, multiplicity and autonomy.

Despite significant achievements, these movements were never close to running the country. Furthermore, a young movement is not likely to be able to contest a presidential election. It should, however, strive to establish new solidarity networks that will heal those broken by the dictatorship; it must continue to grow and learn from its mistakes.

This is happening every day in Argentina and efforts are made internationally to support their struggle.

Patricio McCabe, associated with the Encuentro de Pensamiento Autonomo, a space for reflection on social issues, suggests that the process that followed the mass actions of December 19th and 20th can be evaluated by looking at what the government has been forced to do in response:

-Brutal repression of actions, evictions of community centers and state terrorism, as in the execution of activists like



# MYTHS AND LIES ABOUT ELECTIONS...

## from an Anarchist Perspective

By Wayne Price



### MYTH #2:

**"YOUR VOTE COUNTS."**

In the over-centralized, massified, and over-urbanized society of industrial capitalism, one vote has little significance. It has been argued by liberals that Florida 2000 disproved this, by showing that a small number of votes made a difference in a national election. Actually, the truth is just the opposite. In Florida in 2000, there was so much obvious electoral fraud, miscounting of ballots, denial of the vote to African Americans, confusing ballots, and so on, that what was demonstrated was the fraudulence of bourgeois elections--the difficulty of being counted at all. Finally the election was settled by a vote of five out of nine Supreme Court justices! This is aside from the fact that in the U.S., presidential elections are settled through the archaic electoral college. It is possible for a candidate to lose the popular vote and still be legally elected.

### MYTH #3:

**"POPULAR VICTORIES ARE WON THROUGH ELECTIONS. THEREFORE, TO REJECT ELECTORAL ACTIVITY IS TO REJECT POLITICAL STRUGGLE."**



Actually most popular gains in U.S. history have been won through extra-electoral activities. In the sixties (from the mid fifties to the mid seventies),

### MYTH #1:

**"THE COUNTRY IS RUN BY ELECTIONS."**



Under capitalist (or bourgeois) democracy, elections serve two purposes.

One is to settle differences between factions of the ruling class, the corporate rich. These factions may have real differences, but these are within the narrow limits of capitalism, imperialism, and the national state. For example, the Democrat Kerry and the Republican Bush are both for the Iraqi war-and-occupation, and, generally, in favor of the U.S. dominating oppressed nations and waging wars against them from time to time. Whenever possible, the capitalists prefer a bourgeois limited democracy to an outright dictatorship. Under a limited-democracy, capitalist differences can be settled without bloodshed, and incompetent rulers can be replaced without revolution.

The other use of elections for the capitalists is to give the working class population the impression that it runs the government. This was the big problem with the 2000 presidential elections, which threatened to expose this fraud. Under capitalism, when there is only one candidate in an election, it is called a dictatorship, when there are only two (both representing the very rich) it is called a democracy. Either way, the capitalist class rules.



the Black Liberation movement won its reforms outside of elections. In the South there were mass civil disobedience campaigns (civil disobedience means breaking the law). In the North there were the ghetto rebellions (so-called riots). As a result, Southern legal segregation was abolished, anti-discrimination and affirmative action laws were passed, and social welfare benefits were expanded (although Blacks remain on the bottom of society).

The movement against the war in Vietnam involved large demonstrations, campus occupations and strikes, draft dodging, and a virtual mutiny in the armed forces. Together with the armed struggle of the Vietnamese, these ended the war. Women's liberation included consciousness-raising groups and militant mass demonstrations. The Gay and Lesbian liberation movement began with the rebellion on Christopher Street, NYC, where male prostitutes and transvestites (the most despised) fought the police.

In the previous radicalization of the thirties, workers won unions through mass strikes, plant occupations, and fighting against the police, National Guard, and vigilantes.

In short, most mass struggles took place outside of elections. Then the politicians ran around to get in front of the movements and offered reforms.

Today one successful big strike would do more to beat back the right-wing Republican attack than the election of any number of Democrats. The big issue is not how individuals vote, one by one. The issue is the strategy of mass organizations: the unions, the churches and organizations of the Black community, the organizations of the Latino communities, the women's movement, the Gay and Lesbian rights groups, the environmentalist movement. Potentially these represent most people: workers, women, people of color (a third of the U.S.), and everyone who wants to breathe

clean air. These forces spend a lot of money and human resources in elections. Instead they should be spending their money and efforts in organizing, direct action, and general hell-raising.



**"THE LESSER EVIL IS THE GREATER GOOD."**

**MYTH #4:**

When election periods start, many liberals declare that they will vote for the Democrats as the lesser evil. But as time goes on they persuade themselves that the Democrats are really good and worthy leaders. To say that the Democrats are the lesser evil is to admit that they are an evil. Choosing the lesser evil is like choosing to eat a smaller dose of rat poison. The Democrats are an explicitly pro-capitalist, pro-militarist party. Each election cycle we on the far-left demonstrate how the Democratic candidates are rotten, racist, warmongers. For example, it is not hard to show that John Kerry, a wealthy man who made enthusiastic speeches in support of the war against Iraq, is not really the candidate of peace and support for working people. Personally, I do not try to persuade liberal friends and family members not to vote for Democrats. I do try to get them to admit that the Democrats are evil, even if lesser.

**MYTH #5:**

**"BECAUSE THE REPUBLICANS ARE WORSE THAN THE DEMOCRATS, WE SHOULD SUPPORT THE DEMOCRATS."**



## The Argentine Autonomist Movement and the Elections

By Graciela Montegudo

The Argentine social movements are at once young and old. They were born in 1945 with the spontaneous mass mobilization that brought Peron to power. They were also born in 1959 in Cuba. The people of those movements were disappeared, tortured, and eventually killed from 1975 to 1982, first under a peronist government and then under a military dictatorship. Thirty thousand people were disappeared so that today the IMF could dictate its economic policies. We can say, with Cesar Vallejo, that those movements were killed but did not die. In December 2001, they took the streets with direct democracy and direct action.

The disenchantment and rage of those who participated on December 19th and 20th of 2001 and in the mobilizations that followed are symptomatic of the crash of neoliberalism. Upper and middle class folks were fed up with an economy that devoured up their lifelong savings and rendered their streets unsafe with so many people roaming around homeless and jobless. These were the same folks who successfully ignored the brutal repression of the 1976 dictatorship. They welcome the privatizations and the peso-pegged-to-the-dollar during the Menem government. They believed they were in the first world. They had always believed it. When all that came crashing down during the De la Rúa government, it aroused their frustration and anger with the system. The insecurity of these times also provoked the rage of the young, who had been excluded from the market but had not been marked directly by the terror of the dictatorship.

As upper classes and youth began to turn against the system, those days brought the struggle of the unemployed families to the forefront. These people had been blocking major highways (piquetes) in the interior of the country since mid-nineties. They had been organizing direct actions

with direct democracy. The popular assemblies were born out of that fresh anger and rage. They also grew from an older tradition of assemblies in the working place, in the school, and in the colleges. The tradition can be traced to the anarchists in the labor movement in the 20's. Their direct democracy methods also stem from the "piquetes" in the interior of the country, such as Cutral-Co and Salta. In the cities, the activists met middle-class neighbors, as all banged on empty pots and pans, and passed the tradition along. Soon many people without any experience in organizing learned the ropes of direct democracy and used new tools to confront the economic and social crisis that they faced.

The process highlighted by December 19th and 20th shows us that masses of people disillusioned by a corrupt system, using methods of direct democracy and direct action, can put pressure on the government to produce certain changes, most notably the lack of payment on the debt. However, at no point in this process were the assemblies able to organize themselves as an alternative to the centralized power of the government. Political forces operating within the assemblies, such as the progressive peronists and leftist political parties, made that impossible. By the time some of the trotskyist organizations decided to destroy the assemblies, since they could not control them, the participation of the middle class had already declined. This occurred partly because of the brutal repression that met virtually every one of the protests, but also because many people had hoped to find immediate solutions.

At that point, although the actions were huge, the movement did not recognize itself, nor was it conscious of its power. Although the actions of December 19th and 20th collectively opposed the representational political system, opposed



These are reminders of what is possible, if only as preconditions for social reconstruction.

Our goal as antiauthoritarians in America should not be to turn out the vote (though as voters who despise Bush, we may want to do that too). Nor should it be to worry about whether to vote or not (a minor irritant relative to numerous other statist intrusions). Nor should it be to match the presidential spectacle with one of our own. Our aim should instead be to expand people's sense of political and social possibilities in contrast to actually existing (non)democracy and capitalism.

For a political culture must first be forged before politics — that is, self-governance — can be imagined, much less constituted.

But we must also recognize that at present, fear genuinely impacts how people choose or are permitted to participate in political life. Such insecurity goes beyond the fear of being blown up on the way to work. The anxieties caused by capitalist globalization concern whether one even has work, not to mention food, health care, and so much more. As the "anti-globalization" movement demonstrated, it is possible to reshape political discourse, placing discussions of problems like capitalism on the worldwide map. A baby step, to be sure, on the road to social transformation, and yet many people have been politicized in and indeed through the process.

We should therefore turn this referendum's question on its head. With our projects and literature, we could ask not how to best fight the war on terror—thereby brushing aside the usual answers of more

military or surveillance, or conversely "give peace a chance" — but how to best bring about security for all—thereby sketching utopian alternatives, as radicals in Germany are now doing in response to the government's cuts to social services with their far-reaching demand, "Everything for everyone, and what's more for free!"

Most crucially, we should organize around the U.S. election as if the whole world were watching, because it is; and we should watch the whole world, because we need to.

Terror, elections, and extra-parliamentary politics: such is the uneasy mix we've been handed by recent world events. As Spaniards have indicated, it's not the politician one votes for or against that counts, but how people collectively respond to critical global issues. Ethical praxis can reconfigure the geopolitical landscape. What kind of referendum will we declare, with thoughtful words and proactive actions, to help reduce fear and enlarge freedom this election year?

**Our aim should instead be to expand people's sense of political and social possibilities in contrast to actually existing (non)democracy and capitalism.**

The Republicans are worse than the Democrats in most ways. But this does not support the tactic of lesser-evilism. The far-right cannot be beaten by supporting the Democrats. Over the course of many election cycles, liberals and unions and Blacks, etc., have consistently organized, spent money, and voted, for Democrats. What has been the result? The Republicans have been completely taken over by the far-right. The Democrats have consistently moved to the right (just a little bit to the left of the Republicans). The last Democratic U.S. president, Bill Clinton, virtually destroyed welfare support for poor women, waged war on Yugoslavia, and continued the blockade of Iraq, among other evil deeds. The whole political spectrum has shifted to the right. Far from defeating the right, lesser-evilism has resulted in its growth.



MYTH #6:

**"ELECTIONS WOULD BE OKAY IF WE COULD TAKE MONEY OUT OF IT."**

In the first place this would be almost impossible. Running an election in a big country takes a lot of cash, and this requires getting it from those who have it (whatever effort is also made to get small donations). But the main problem is not money in elections. However elected, politicians are committed to running a government which presides over a capitalist market economy. This cannot be done unless their programs are pro-capitalist. Any policies which antagonize big business will result in economic difficulties. If too antagonized, the capitalists will deliberately go on strike, stop investing, close down industries, send

money overseas, and cause rising unemployment and chaos. The reformers will probably be voted out in the next election. If the reformers stick to their programs, the capitalists will hire fascist gangs, subvert the military and police, and organize a coup, canceling further elections. Then they will murder thousands of leftists, unionists, and random people. After the left has been thoroughly decimated, they may allow an eventual return to limited democracy. (I am not making this up. This is the history of fascism in Europe in the twenties and thirties and of similar later events such as the overthrow of Allende in Chile in the seventies.) Of course, the Democrats would never remotely be such a threat to their big business friends.

MYTH #7:

**"IF THE DEMOCRATS ARE NO SOLUTION, THEN WE NEED A NEW PARTY."**



While rejecting the trap of the Democratic Party, this opinion stays within the trap of electoralism. The need to get masses of money remains. The problems of proposing to manage a capitalist state and economy remain. Elections are their instrument. It is the arena of capitalism, as much as the stock market. There is no advantage in replacing the Democrats with a new pro-capitalist party. The capitalist system is the problem, not the Democrats as such. Ralph Nader, for example, has been denouncing the corporate rich and their domination of politics. But his program, over the years, has been for a better regulated capitalism. Yet his own work has demonstrated, time after time, how attempts to regulate capitalism have always



failed to improve things. Compared to the other candidates, Nader is the lesser evil—but still an evil because he supports the system, however critically.

Nor would things be better if a labor party was created by the unions. It would rely on the same sort of base as any new capitalist party: the union bureaucrats, the political hacks and demagogues currently on the limited left of the Democratic Party, church officials, and confused but ambitious liberals. Its program would certainly be pro-capitalist and pro-statist, accepting the supposed need for a big military. It would still have to jump through the hoops of the electoral system and then plan to run the capitalist state. The terrible policies of Labor Parties and Social Democratic parties in other countries (including the New Democratic Party of Canada) is not an argument for a U.S. labor party. Similarly the rapid degeneration of the German Green Party (part of the government in Germany, where it supported the Yugoslavian war) is a horrible example of the effects of electoralism.

It would be extremely difficult to create a new, third party in the U.S. The U.S. has a winner-takes-all system (no proportional representation), and elects people for different time periods in different positions (including six years for senators and lifetime appointments for judges). Besides frequent fraud, it has outright undemocratic features, such as the electoral college or the two senators from each state, regardless of the size of the state (so little Rhode Island and gigantic California have equal representation in the Senate). Such factors make it very hard to build a new party. The last time a new party was successful in the U.S. was when the country was in such a crisis that it soon broke down into a violent civil war (that is, the formation of the Republicans).

Even if it would be good to have a new party, the question is whether the left should be spending its limited human resources and money to try to do it.

The advantages which the people have are *non-electoral*. We have numbers and potential organization. In particular, the workers have their hands on the means of production and distribution of all goods and services. The workers could shut society down by a general strike. Or we could start it up again in a different and better way. If challenged by the military, we could appeal to the ranks, which are made up of the sons and daughters of the working class. Oppressed people should be relying on this sort of power, not trying to compete with the bosses in their made-to-order arena.

## Don't Just Vote

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Bombs, cells of the Environmental Liberation Front, and your grandmother's knitting circle can all participate in. As with direct action and direct democracy in general, and in stark contrast to electoral politics, harmony is the only goal that must be sought between participants; unity, on the other hand, is unnecessary and irrelevant.

Election day will be a flash point for many concerns and desires this year. Afterwards, we can be sure that people will retire from civic engagement in despair or relief—unless they've had a positive experience to remind them how much more they can do outside electoral politics. This is an opportunity we must not miss.

Join us, with your friends and neighbors, in whatever ways you see fit, in emphasizing the power people have outside electoral politics! No more "shut up and vote"—let's get active!

Indeed, in the heart of Germany's capital, one sees signs reading "Americans Go Home." This is not a specifically German problem; anti-Americanism goes hand in glove with new forms of nationalism across the globe. Yet even in a country quite similar to our own, and arguably just as complicit in structural domination despite its recent antiwar stance, only 38 percent of Germans view the United States with favor now, compared to 61 percent just under two years ago (based on Pew Research Center surveys). U.S. activists also subscribe to the lazy dichotomy of "America bad" versus "Not-America good," or at the very least benign. One sees this in the slogans here at home equating the United States with empire, and as we all know from *Star Wars*, the empire is evil.

No matter who wins the White House, the force of the U.S. government will still be with us, domestically and abroad. But the United States is only one player — currently the biggest — within flexible, multidirectional networks of hierarchical power that include other states, regional blocs, transnational corporations, supranational institutions, and nongovernmental organizations. Placing blame on America alone serves to mask the insidious kinds of social control emerging under capitalist globalization. Just consider the European Union's decision to appoint a counterterrorist coordinator at the supra-state level in light of Madrid. Not only does this represent a concentration of policing powers, further eviscerating civil liberties; it is also integral to developing a political bloc that aspires to equal or exceed the U.S. government's might.

**B**eyond confusing a critique of the United States with a critique of centralized governance, anti-

Americanism masks another source of hegemony: capitalism writ global. America may look like the belly of this beast given its power and wealth, and yet a singular focus on the United States obscures the immanent dynamic of capital. For what drives capitalism's insatiable hunger is not its location but its very locomotive: a grow-or-die imperative. To thrive as a social system, capitalism must incessantly push past limits (such as time, space, and national boundaries), all the while forging social relations in its own image. While capitalism long ago commodified goods and labor, it continues to extend into our leisure hours, our subjectivity, and even our biology. And thanks to new communications technologies coupled with a host of structural and cultural changes since the 1970s, the world's people are brought closer together in accelerated real time while being ever more bound to capital's constricting logic.

As such, another tension during this election-as-referendum is: How do we, as "American" critics of America, work against U.S. dominance and at the same time, as transnational critics of capitalist globalization, work against an anti-Americanism that masks forms of domination, old and new?

Which brings me to the third of my daily preoccupations: stories of global resistance. Like the people of Georgia or Taiwan standing for days outside their parliament and presidential palace, respectively, when their recent national elections seemed suspect. Like the people of Argentina and Algeria, when their political sphere failed them several years ago, initiating face-to-face assemblies. Or like Spaniards, pouring into the streets by the millions on March 12 with the simple message "no to murder" during a time of sorrow and politics.



United States — in Bush's "war on terror."

There is an ambiguity to this election-turned-referendum, however, initiated as it was by al Qaeda (or some like-minded group). Madrid is a tragic example of what can potentially happen when the ethical concerns of the majority carry no sway. Aznar, like Bush and Blair, had turned a deaf ear to the massive antiwar protests a year earlier — a tension between "leaders" and "people" that was in hindsight ripe for deadly exploitation. The timing of the explosions seemed geared to fix the Spanish election; one can only hope this perverted strategy isn't repeated elsewhere. But the questions of veracity and policy are no less significant simply because they were raised in a terribly wrong manner. A nagging thought remains: How can people both do the right thing and avoid validating tactics intended to induce fear?

Of course, fear is by no means the exclusive tool of terrorists. The Bush administration has put anxiety to good use for all sorts of unscrupulous moves, from shepherding the Patriot Act to establishing Guantanamo Bay to preemptively striking Iraq, and it will continue to employ this method throughout the electoral campaign. For instance, one of the first Bush ads featured a glimpse of an "Arab male" at an airport. Fear, xenophobic or otherwise, does not need to be manufactured these days. The mentality behind the all-too-real global warfare being waged by powerful forces like Bush (or John Kerry, if elected) and Bin Laden (or his brethren) has guaranteed that. This is why the question of how social movements should act in the face of such insecurity is so crucial to one's humanity.

But for libertarian anticapitalists in the

United States, the referendum's ambiguity goes deeper. Spain underscores a paradox: the lack of substantive political alternatives offered by representative democracies even as national elections take on added importance in our interdependent world. The Spanish electorate had little ability to act decisively except within the circumscribed space of the polling booth, but there was a choice beyond one country's borders. Spain's new Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero represented a vote for peace — something Kerry can't claim — and yet only if the lens is narrowed to avoid the structural violence under statecraft, capitalism, and militarism. Elections can sometimes function as popular initiatives, and yet only because there is no place for most of us to participate directly in making domestic and transnational decisions.

The harsh reality is that, as always, without fundamentally changing social relations rather than political parties, this year's U.S. presidential election matters very little. And at the same time, from a global perspective, it matters more than ever — even if Bush only symbolizes a more obnoxious, unilateral version of America-as-superpower than his Democratic better half. The perplexing question for antistatist leftists, then, is: How do we simultaneously ignore the election spectacle and engage in the influential political space it creates?

The dilemma goes deeper still. Spain ensured that there is much more at stake in the U.S. election than Bush versus Not-Bush; but the legitimate questioning of U.S. geopolitics appears to be exacerbating anti-Americanism. As one German man was overheard explaining to his child during the Iraq invasion anniversary, Berlin's protesters were "against war and the shitty Americans."

# TOWARDS A NEW POLITICS:

## NEITHER THE STREETS NOR THE STATE

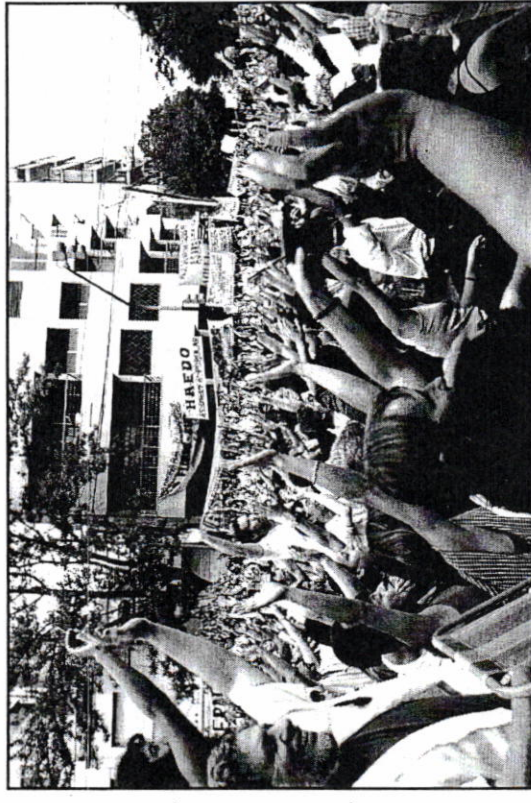
BY BLAIR TAYLOR AND ROB AUGMAN

It's election time, and once again the familiar debates surrounding radicals and the electoral realm have resurfaced. These arguments generally fall into one of two categories. On the one hand, there is the anarchist and activist disdain for electoralism — vote, or don't, but real politics is elsewhere, in the streets. Others respond to this charge that we cannot ignore power where it is, and must secure the candidate that comes closest to our views. This dichotomy of skeptical young idealists unwilling to engage a corrupt system versus protest-weary pragmatists who seek access to the power they've been fighting, has hindered the development of effective new political strategies. This article argues that we need a new politics that draws on the insights of both positions — combining the radical democratic aspirations of anarchism/activism with the need for institutions advocated by electoral-minded radicals — while avoiding the limitations of each.

While direct democracy is a popular concept in activist circles, it is usually reserved for discussions of internal movement dynamics rather than articulated as a viable institutional alternative to the state. However, without institutional form, direct democracy is limited to direct action. While temporarily empowering, direct action and protest ultimately act as forms of street lobbying, whereby dissent seeks to *influence* or obstruct policy rather than transform how, and by whom, those decisions are made. Without carving

out a new form of democratic power, we are endlessly reacting to the undemocratic decisions of our political masters. Lacking institutional form, our democratic ideals remain just that, abstract ideals limited to the *lifeways* of the anarchist/activist movement.

Electoral-minded radicals recognize these limitations of activism and the need to secure power. However, by attempting to gain power as it presently



exists, they fail to problematize representation and the state. As anarchists well understand, representation is the systematic disempowerment of the population. Political representatives, no matter what their views are, perpetuate this disempowerment of the people by a professional elite class of chaparones. By seeking to become these policy-makers they privilege the "end" of better policy over the "means" of how those policies are made and implemented. By sacrificing democratic process, the authoritarian



nature of the state remains unchanged.

We believe that the radical democratic aspirations of anarchists/activists and the institutional focus of electoral-minded radicals both offer vital components for a new political orientation that is liberatory as well as strategically possible. Such a politics envisions a free society of a directly democratic political arena of confederated popular assemblies. This democratic vision urges us to transform existing governing institutions by prying them open to ever-increasing levels of participation, with the goal of establishing truly democratic institutions of popular self-governance.

The following are a few short-term goals that could give life to this political orientation:

**1. Democratizing the Social Struggle** - In our struggles for justice in particular arenas such as health care, schools, and workplaces, we can organize to change policy as well as secure ever-greater democratic control over these institutions. This would in practice mean fighting not only for better wages, but control of working conditions. For access to health care, but also increasing control over health care decisions. For diversification of the curriculum, but also for the power to directly participate in educational decision-making.

**2. Structural Reform in the Electoral Realm** - Short of immediate direct democracy, we can push present-day politics in the direction of our principles of self-government, decentralization, and social justice. Proportional representation would allow for increased political participation for populations excluded by the winner-take-all two party system. While still representation, this is a step towards greater inclusion and diversity of political options. Instant Runoff Voting - this would allow voters to rank their ballot choices in order to vote for their first choice without ending up supporting

their last. Campaign-finance reform - massive inequalities of resources make real democracy impossible, therefore clean election legislation as won in Arizona and Maine is a step towards leveling the effects of money on the playing field.

**3. Municipal Campaigns** - We could run candidates or sponsor referendum/initiatives that attempt to pry open current decision-making structures to increasing levels of participation by the public. This would be part of a long-term strategy for dissolving elite rule into ever more accountable, decentralized bodies, down to the local assembly. We could seek to take specific powers away from less-accountable bodies (appointed positions such as police chiefs or redevelopment boards), giving these powers to citizen boards instead.

These are a few suggestions for radicalizing societal institutions towards democratic participation and self-governance. When successful, these reforms empower people to reclaim control of their lives, reduce hierarchical power relations, expand the scope of decision-making to other spheres of life, and open up new fronts for further struggle. Even when unsuccessful, these efforts would have an educational value by challenging the legitimacy of representation and creating increased demand for direct democracy. These suggestions can be seen as initial steps for filling the gap in Left politics between form and content, by constructing the democratic political arena that is necessary for a truly free society.

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*\* For more information on the political perspective of direct democracy: [www.afadd.org](http://www.afadd.org) and [www.communalism.net](http://www.communalism.net)*

## In the Wake of Madrid, the U.S. Election Turns into a Global Referendum

By Cindy Milstein

The world gets smaller and scarier by the day. This simple fact is the context for my morning routine: a cup of coffee sipped to the latest news of terrorism. It is equally the backdrop for my other media scan: the U.S. presidential race. More and more these two intertwine. The ballot box, as 3/11 in Madrid cruelly announced, is now a front in a borderless war that puts everyone at risk. But as the Spanish people proved, it can also be turned into a referendum — albeit one with a certain degree of ambiguity.

There are two probable reasons why the Spanish electorate ousted the Popular Party three days after the commuter train bombings. On the one hand, the mere appearance of deception by the ruling government in terms of who was responsible for the Madrid attacks was justification enough in the voters' eyes for a change of leadership. The election essentially became a popular initiative as to the head of state's trustworthiness in fighting terrorism—reason aplenty for G. W. Bush (and Tony Blair) to tremble. A subsequent antiwar ad in the *New York Times* says it all: "Have You Noticed What's Happening to Chief Executives Who Lie?"

On the other hand, Spain's election went well beyond the honesty issue. Former Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar was one of Bush's staunchest allies despite the fact that 90 percent of the Spanish populace was against joining the so-called coalition. In part, Spaniards feared an escalation of violence, and on that March morning, their apprehension was sadly confirmed. Thousands demonstrated for peace on election eve, and that sentiment catapulted the Socialist Party to victory. Spanish troops may soon withdraw from Iraq. Yet in the long run, something more important won out.

While September 11 muffled critical voices within the United States in a frenzy of flags and paranoia, March 11 seems to have had the opposite effect. The casualty load has grown too heavy, too everyday, due to the maneuvers of both political fundamentalists and nation-states. Despite their grief, Spaniards demanded in essence that the citizenry serve

as "vigilant custodians of freedom," to borrow a phrase from Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta. In prying open a space for debate via nominally democratic mechanisms, Spain has had a ripple effect. And perhaps nowhere has the contest over notions such as "freedom" and "democracy" been greater than in the United States. So it should come as no surprise that Madrid has also transmuted the upcoming U.S. presidential election.

Rather than a vote for one person or party, then, the Spanish election marked the start of a global referendum concerning the geopolitical role of nation-states — particularly the

